

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS  
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**Florence School District  
Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process Report 2002-2003**

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**Dates of On Site Visit:** March 18-19, 2003

**Date of Report:** March 28, 2003

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This report contains the results of the steering committee's self-assessment and the validation of the self-assessment by the Office of Special Education. The report addresses six principles – General Supervision, Free Appropriate Public Education, Appropriate Evaluation, Procedural Safeguards, Individualized Education Program and Least Restrictive Environment. Each principle is rated based on the following scale:

<b>Promising Practice</b>	The district/agency exceeds this requirement through the implementation of innovative, high-quality programming and instructional practices.
<b>Meets Requirements</b>	The district/agency consistently meets this requirement.
<b>Needs Improvement</b>	The district/agency has met this requirement but has identified areas of weakness that left unaddressed may result in non-compliance.
<b>Out of Compliance</b>	The district/agency consistently does not meet this requirement.
<b>Not applicable</b>	In a small number of cases, the standard may not be applicable for your district/agency. If an item is not applicable, the steering committee should briefly explain why the item is NA. Example – no private schools within the district boundaries.

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<b>Principle 1 – General Supervision</b>
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General supervision means the school district's administrative responsibilities to ensure federal and state regulations are implemented and a free appropriate public education is provided for each eligible child with a disability. The specific areas addressed in principle one are child find, referral procedures, children voluntarily enrolled by parents in private schools, students placed by the school district, improving results through performance goals and indicators (assessment, drop out, graduation), professional development, suspension and expulsion rates.

**Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

Table A

B – District/agency instructional staff information

C – Suspension and expulsion information

D – Statewide assessment information

E – Enrollment information

F – Placement alternatives

G – Disabling conditions  
H – Exiting information  
Parent survey  
Referrals  
Publications of child find notices  
Comprehensive plan  
Yearly child find results  
Pre-referral form  
School team documentation  
Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)  
Reviews  
NESC Cooperative handbook  
File reviews  
School sped expenditures  
Private school information  
Child count data  
Student Information Management System (SIMS)  
Placement alternatives  
Budget  
Surveys  
Workshops and inservices  
Employee handbook  
Area training  
Technology in Teaching and Learning (TTL)  
Board policies  
Continuing education

### **Promising practice**

The steering committee stated that Florence School District has a school team for helping students having difficulty. The team consists of classroom teacher, parent, principal, special education teacher, guidance counselor and another teacher who does not know the student. They meet and discuss the student's strengths and needs. They then identify two or three specific problems that need to be addressed and develop strategies to implement in the classroom. The team determines when it is appropriate to meet next and review the student's progress. If the team feels the student is not making progress a referral will be documented. Many times the strategies that were implemented help the student and a referral is not needed.

The Florence school uses Curriculum Based Measurement for all students in grades one-six. Special education teachers have been trained in TTL and were involved in the data retreat.

### **Meets requirements**

The steering committee determined that the district has identified systems for receiving documented referrals. The district has surveyed groups involved in the child find activities, reviewed files, and has policies and procedures which address this issue. The district meets the needs of all students in the referral process. They have a school team that meets to help students for pre-referral assistance and students are helped in the classroom before a referral is made. These strategies have resulted in a child not being referred for services.

Relevant school data is used to analyze and review student progress toward the state performance goals and indicators. Review of files verifies this progress as fifty-nine percent of all students on IEPs have met their annual goals and sixty-five percent of the short term objectives have been met. The school district follows and adheres to the state guidelines for reporting of students suspended, expelled, or

dropped out as per the reports required by the state regulations. Florence has had no students drop out of school.

The district meets requirements for certified staff. Two teachers are in the process of acquiring required degrees. Teachers have received training to meet the needs of students and their needs. The paraprofessionals need more involvement in the evaluation process. The Special Education teacher is attending the AREA reading training.

### **Validation Results**

#### **Promising practice**

The monitoring team was not able to validate school teams as being a promising practice. Pre-referral meetings are best practice of using good teaching techniques that schools use for all students. The monitoring team could not validate that special education teachers trained in TTL and being involved in the data retreat as a promising practice as these opportunities are open to all teachers in the state. Curriculum based measurement is a promising practice, the Northeast Educational Services Cooperative is helping the school to track scores and this will lead to better teaching procedures in the school system.

#### **Meets requirements**

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as meets requirements for general supervision as concluded by the steering committee.

## **Principle 2 – Free Appropriate Public Education**

All eligible children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The specific areas addressed in principle two are the provision of FAPE to children residing in group homes, foster homes, or institutions, making FAPE available when a child reaches his/her 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday and providing FAPE to eligible children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school for more than 10 cumulative days.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

State tables C, E, F, K, L, M, N

Age at referral

Number of students screened

Personnel development education

Preschool age

School age

Personnel training

Budget information

Comprehensive plan

Surveys

#### **Meets requirements**

The steering committee concluded that current practices and past reviews from the state and federal special education monitoring demonstrate the school district provides a FAPE for all children with disabilities. Administrators are trained yearly in policies and procedures for expelling or suspending students on IEPs.

## **Validation Results**

### **Meets requirements**

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as meets requirements for free appropriate public education as concluded by the steering committee.

## **Principle 3 – Appropriate Evaluation**

A comprehensive evaluation is conducted by a team of knowledgeable staff, which also includes parental input. A valid and reliable evaluation will result in effective individualized education programs for eligible students. The specific areas addressed in principle three are written notice and consent for evaluation, evaluation procedures and instruments, eligibility determination, reevaluation and continuing eligibility.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

State tables G, H, I, J,

TAT information

Teacher file reviews

Initial referral

Surveys

Parent and teacher report forms

Comprehensive plan

IEPs

Permission to evaluate forms

File reviews

SIMS

Referrals

Psychological reports

Progress reports

Report cards

### **Meets requirements**

The steering committee reviewed IEPs and survey results, policies and procedures adopted by the school district, and indicate the school district is following the appropriate state regulations and procedures for testing instruments. All evaluations used meet the minimum requirement for the state. Parent input into the evaluation process has been at 100% since the 2000 school year. Policies and procedures, file reviews and parental surveys indicate the IEP team considers all evaluations to determine a category of disability. According to file reviews, parental surveys, along with adherence to federal, state, and local policies and procedures, the district provides documentation of eligibility determination to the parent. All procedural requirements are adhered to in accordance with state and federal laws. The school district utilizes state eligibility testing procedures to ensure students are appropriately evaluated for continuing eligibility.

### **Out of compliance**

The steering committee found that one speech student's evaluation was started before the permission was signed and two students were noted to have not met the 25 day timeline for evaluations.

## **Validation Results**

### **Meets requirements**

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as meets requirements for appropriate evaluation as concluded by the steering committee except for one. The team was not able to verify that parent input into the evaluation process has been at 100% since the 2000 school year. This issue was moved to the needs improvement category.

### **Needs improvement**

The monitoring team moved the issue of evaluations started before the permission signed and not meeting the 25 day timeline to the needs improvement area. The monitoring team reviewed 18 files and did not find this to be a systemic problem.

### **Out of compliance**

**ARSD 24:05:24.01:28. Criteria for language disorder** A student may be identified as having a language disorder as a primary disability if through age eight, performance falls 1.5 standard deviations below the mean on standardized evaluation instruments; beginning at age nine, a difference is present of 1.5 standard deviations between performance on an individually administered standardized language assessment instrument and measured expected potential as measured by an individually administered intelligence test; and the student's pragmatic skills, as measured by checklists, language samples, or observation, adversely affect the student's academic and social interactions.

**ARSD 24:05:04:02. Determination of needed evaluation data/parent participation input into the evaluation planning process** As part of an initial and reevaluation the student's IEP team and other qualified professionals, as appropriate must review existing evaluation data on the student and determine what additional data, if any are needed to determine eligibility for special education services. The review team found that district does not get parental consent on a regular basis. The district has a form for obtaining parental input, however, in five files reviewed the parent input form had been sent home, but not returned to the school or returned and not completed.

One student file reviewed showed that a speech student who turned nine years of age did not have a complete comprehensive evaluation, the only assessments completed were ability and language. The only areas assessed were in the cognitive and language areas. There was no indication that the parent, general education or special education staff were a part of reviewing existing documentations and determining what evaluations were needed.

Another example of the student's IEP team determining what evaluations should be given or what area should be evaluated was found by the review team in a file reviewed on a student with a learning disability indicated that communication between professionals is lacking when related services (speech) initiated a reevaluation and a few weeks later another prior notice was sent to obtain consent for a comprehensive evaluation from the special education teacher, which then took place for the student.

## **Principle 4 – Procedural Safeguards**

Parents of children with disabilities have certain rights available. The school makes parents aware of these rights and makes sure they are understood. The specific areas addressed in principle four are adult

student/transfer of rights, content of rights, consent, written notice, confidentiality and access to records, independent educational evaluation (IEE), complaint procedures, and due process hearings.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

State tables L and M

Teacher file reviews

Surveys

Parental right document

Consent and prior notice forms

Public awareness information

FERPA disclosure

Comprehensive plan

State surrogate document

Training

Consent and prior notice forms

SPED handbook

Student files

File reviews

School newsletters

### **Meets requirements**

Based on school district policies and regulation requirements, the steering committee concluded that parental surveys and file reviews indicate the district ensures notification to parents of their rights. The school district has policies and procedures ensuring parents fully understand for what activity consent is being sought. All files reviewed showed parent consent was given. The district's policies and procedures provides all parents the opportunity to inspect and review all educational records concerning their child in the provision of a free and appropriate public education.

The steering committee ensures the school district has policies and procedures to address complaint issues. The school district adheres to the federal, state, and local policies and procedures regarding requests for due process hearings.

### **Validation Results**

#### **Meets requirements**

The monitoring team agrees with the areas identified as meeting requirement for procedural safeguards concluded by the steering committee with the exception of issues below.

#### **Out of compliance**

**ARSD 24:05:30:04. Prior notice and parent consent.** Written notice which meets the requirements of § 24:05:30:05 must be given to the parents five days before the district proposes or refuses to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child or the provision of a free appropriate public education to the child.

Informed parental consent must be obtained before conducting a first-time evaluation, reevaluation, and before initial placement of a child in a program providing special education or special education and related services. Parental consent is not required before reviewing existing data as part of an evaluation or reevaluation; or administering a test or other evaluation that is administered to all children unless, before administration of that test or evaluation, consent is required of parents of all children.

The monitoring team was unable to find any prior notices for transition assessments when done outside of the comprehensive evaluation. Consent was not received for transition assessments that were being completed on an annual basis. Interviews with district staff showed that they were unaware that consent was needed for functional assessment.

## **Principle 5 – Individualized Education Program**

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised by the IEP team, which includes the parent. The specific areas addressed in principle five are IEP team, IEP content, transition components for secondary IEPs, annual reviews, transition from early intervention program, and IEP related issues.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

Comprehensive plan  
Student progress data  
Personnel training  
Budget information  
Surveys  
Report form  
File reviews  
Progress data sheets  
IEPs  
Complaints  
Student progress data  
Personnel training  
SPED handbook  
Tables K and N

### **Promising practice**

The steering committee utilizes curriculum based measurements in grades one-six. They have been normed for fall, winter and spring in the areas of reading, math, and writing and progress indicators are kept on all students to help determine if the goals and objectives are being met. One student with Downs Syndrome, one with Asbergers, and one seriously and emotionally disturbed student who uses a Dynavox are in the regular education classroom at least eighty percent of the time with a paraprofessional.

### **Meets requirements**

The steering committee verified that fifty-nine percent of all students on IEPs have met their annual goals and sixty-five percent of the short term objectives have been met. Relevant school data is used to analyze and review their progress toward the state performance goals and indicators.

The school district utilizes written notices with the required content to all parents and/or guardians and has policies and procedures in place for the provision of an appropriate IEP team. All files reviewed showed regular education and administrators were at all meetings. The school district utilizes written notices with the required content to all parents and/or guardians. Outside agencies are invited to meetings for students of transition age and any other students in need of services not provided by the school. The school district utilizes an appropriate IEP format and ensures each IEP contains the required content. Based on file reviews student IEPs in the area of transition have been done appropriately.

## **Validation Results**

### **Promising practice**

The monitoring team agrees with two areas identified as meets requirements for individual education program as concluded by the steering committee. The monitoring team could not validate that having the special education students in the classroom for eighty percent of the time was a promising practice.

### **Meets requirements**

The monitoring team agrees with the issues that review of files for annual goals and short term objectives are met, and that appropriate IEP teams are used identified as meets requirements for individual education program as concluded by the steering committee. The other issues were moved to the out of compliance area.

### **Out of compliance**

**ARSD 24:05:27:01.02. Development, review, and revision of individualized education program.** In developing, reviewing, and revising each student's individualized education program, the team shall consider the strengths of the student and the concerns of the parents for enhancing the education of their student, the results of the initial or most recent evaluation of the student, and as appropriate, the results of the student's performance on any general state or district-wide assessment programs.

In the case of a student whose behavior impedes his/her learning, the IEP team must consider if appropriate strategies and supports are needed to address the behaviors. During student file reviews by the monitoring team two students were found to have behavior concerns that were not addressed. The monitoring team encourages the district to review information in policy pertaining to consideration of special factors.

### **ARSD 24:05:27:01.03 Content of individualized education program (IEP)**

#### **Present Level of Performance**

A student's IEP must contain present levels of performance based upon the skill areas affected by the student's identified disability. The present levels of performance are based upon the functional assessment information gathered during the comprehensive evaluation process. In the majority of the files reviewed, present levels of performance did not contain the student's academic strengths, needs or their involvement in the general curriculum and parental input. The present levels of performance page did not have skill based functional assessment.

**ARSD 24:05:27:13.02. Transition services.** Transition services are a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

The monitoring team placed the issues of using appropriate IEP format, ensuring that each IEP contains the required content, the concerns of the parent, and the transition section of IEPs as out of compliance. The functional assessment did not link to the transition goals in student files. Transition course of study was decided before the meeting where services would be held. In two files reviewed, the evaluation indicated significant behavior concerns, but was not addressed under the consideration of special factors section, or anywhere else on the IEP. Through interviews with staff, it appears that they do not understand how to address this area.



## **Principle 6 – Least Restrictive Environment**

After the IEP is developed or reviewed, the IEP team must decide where the IEP services are to be provided. Consideration begins in the general education classroom for school age students. The specific areas addressed in principle six are placement decisions, consent for initial placement, least restrictive environment procedures, preschool children, and LRE related issues.

### **Steering Committee Self-Assessment Summary**

Data sources used:

State tables E, G, I, J, F, and N

File reviews

Surveys

### **Promising practice**

The Florence School District has a pre-kindergarten program in place that meets 2.5 hours 2.5 days a week. All students in the district may attend at no cost to the parents and if they are four years old by September 1. Students on an IEP younger than four may also attend this program. The district has a kindergarten where students attend five days a week for the entire day and year. The pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs both have community members and high school students who volunteer on a regular basis to assist students.

### **Meets requirements**

The steering committee ensures the school district has policies and procedures in place for addressing the least restrictive environment of students. Behavioral intervention plans have been written for students who require them. All placements of students are done on an individual basis by the IEP team.

### **Validation Results**

### **Promising practice**

The monitoring team was able to validate the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs as promising practices. The students with special needs have the opportunity to receive services on a more consistent basis as they are in school on a regular basis.

The monitoring team was not able to validate that having community members and high school students volunteer in the classrooms as a promising practice because it is not specifically just for students with special needs.

### **Meets requirements**

The monitoring team agrees with all areas identified as meets requirements for least restrictive environment as concluded by the steering committee.